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THE SOCIAL AND ETHICAL VALUE OF THE
FAMILY SYSTEM IN JAPAN.*

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In the May number of the *Shin Koron* appears an interview with Dr. Junjiro Takakusu, the Director of the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages, on the subject "The Family Unit of Japan and the Individual Unit of the Occident." Dr. Takakusu's eminence and his long residence in Great Britain make his utterances noteworthy. While his opinions in this interview are at some points based upon what seem to a Westerner insufficient knowledge or observation, yet on others he makes keen observations which Occidentals may well take to heart. The interview in substance is as follows:

Japan emerged from the Russo-Japanese war with a reputation among the powers which can hardly be enhanced. She has, thereby, caused a readjustment in the balance of power throughout the world. But she has furthermore made it certain that no power will dare to attack her single-handed within the next, say, fifty years. Before the war, Japanese bonds of a face value of ¥1,000 never brought more than ¥700, but now the market price has risen to above that figure. Before the war, there was quite a party in England that looked with suspicion upon the Anglo-Japanese alliance, but which now feels that the alliance is one of the strongest anchors of England's position. Formerly some English magazines were not so much in favor of Japan, but they have all flopped over and are supporting Japan, heart and soul. Not only that, but Englishmen seem to be inclined to take lessons of Japan along the line of education and military arts, *e. g.* Mr. Sawayanagi, the Director of General Education in the Japanese Department of Education, has been invited to London to lecture on Japanese education, and the English Red Cross Society has sent Miss McCall to

* Notwithstanding the inadequate understanding of the individualism of western nations which the following article manifests, it is of interest in showing what the educated Japanese are saying to each other.—Managing Editor.

investigate the organization of the Japanese Red Cross. English officers are being sent to Japan to be attached to Japanese military posts, and some are already here. Before the Hague Peace Conference, Japan was rated as a third-class power, but at one leap she has now made for herself a place among the first-class powers.

The sweeping victory over a great power like Russia makes the Japanese nothing less than a marvelous race. We must, therefore, ask for an explanation. In the West there are all sorts of reasons given; for instance, in America it is said that it is because the Japanese are such light eaters, and there is one party which has even gone to the ridiculous point of advocating the principle of light eating. In London, some persons went around and called on local Japanese, making minute inquiries as to their mode of life, and their conclusion was that although the individual Japanese is an unimpressive person, yet when Japanese are massed they can do things which Westerners cannot; so in the West students are still puzzled to get at the real secret of our wonderful achievements. They will not rest satisfied, however, with a mere shrug of the shoulder, and "I do not know," as we are inclined to do, but will follow the problem to the end.

What is the secret of the corporate unity and oneness of spirit of Japanese soldiers and their remarkable discipline? What is the reason for the superior sanitation and commissary arrangements of our army? What is the reason for the utter scorn of death, which seems almost animal-like, and that passionate patriotism which possess us? And finally, what is the reason for the absolute security of military secrets? We must confess that looked at one by one we are weak, but when massed together we are stronger than Western soldiers. And furthermore, we Japanese have not only assimilated Western knowledge and mechanisms, but we have improved on them in not a few cases, as for instance, the Shimose gunpowder, the Murata rifle, the Arisaka gun and the Kimura wireless telephone. Our Red Cross Society, while at first copied from the West, has attained a unique pitch of perfection, and our relief of soldiers' families, our system of information, our care for prisoners of

war and our issuing of government bonds, have all demonstrated that we can subordinate personal and private interests to public welfare, so that it is not too much to say, that among the peoples of the world we are considered in this respect to be an ideal army and nation.

There certainly must be deep-seated reasons for this. Of course, we must admit that our thorough military and naval training and our system of public education during the last forty years are the immediate causes, but the primary cause for all these phenomena is that in Japan the family is the unit, whereas in the West the individual is the unit of society. If we inquire what is implied in making the individual the standard, we must reply that it means putting personal gain and personal convenience foremost and ignoring the convenience and interest of others, or even if others are considered, it is, in the last analysis, for selfish reasons. For instance, the child considers that he owes his parents no special return, because they, as his authors, were responsible for him, and when he reaches maturity his first duty is to look out for himself. This leads to the revolting custom of children paying board to their parents when they reach their majority, and an elder brother, although he may be a millionaire, feels that he is under no obligation to support a younger brother who has become a beggar through his own indolence or wrong-doing. If parents are well-to-do, then children will often come to see them in order to stand a better chance of inheritance, but if they are poor, then the children set up for themselves and gradually grow farther and farther away. In short, in the West, gold is life and self-interest is central. They never think of accepting money from parents if they can possibly help it. If a man cannot earn enough to support himself and wife he will not think of marrying; and so, if you were to ask a millionaire: "Your son is certainly of marriageable age, when does he propose to marry?" he will answer, "Oh my, he is not thinking of that yet, he is not getting enough salary to support two."

In Japan, the family system leads to mutual succor and mutual coöperation on the part of all those who are at all connected. Parents help children and children parents. Elder

brothers help the younger and the younger help the elder. The honor and glory of the house are the first concern of all. If there is want in one section it is made up by another. And these families gathered together into groups, make a village, and groups of villages infinitely multiplied make a corporate nation. To be sure, this principle tends to foster a spirit of borrowing and dependence, but it also makes possible some of the finest fruits of national patriotism and family devotion, so that we Japanese look back for 120 generations to the founder of our empire, Jimmu Tenno, and feel that ever since we have been all one people. In Japan, though an emperor lack distinguishing virtues, we never falter in our allegiance to him, and we say with all our hearts: "May our emperor reign for a thousand, yes, eight thousand ages."

The term family unit in the West has a different connotation from that with us. In the West the man and wife alone constitute a family. When children grow up they marry and separate, but in Japan a family is a chain of generations all linked together for mutual dependence and mutual help. It is this principle of mutual obligation which has given birth to Bushidō and to the spirit of patriotism. A parent whose child is killed, although at first he may be inclined to rush to help, yet will grit his teeth and say like Masaoka: "It is for the sake of our lord and master." When a telegram comes from army headquarters telling of the death of a husband on the battlefield, it is this spirit that makes wives rejoice that their husbands have fulfilled a soldier's duty. And from this same principle have come the wonderful military discipline, the contempt of death, the *esprit de corps*, the scarcity of Russian spies.

In the West when a man dies, his wife upon hearing of it is likely to faint away, but in Japan a wife curbs the natural emotions under the impulse to see that the family does not suffer.

From the point of view of individualism, death on the battlefield is the height of folly, but to one who holds to the family principle the thought must come, when faced with danger or death: "How will this affect my parents? If I am

guilty of any disgraceful act it will bring dishonor upon my whole family and house. I must die." When a soldier leaves for the front he is escorted with flags by all his fellow townsmen, singing: "Crush like a jewel; scatter like a flower;" but if perchance he comes back alive because of fear of death, there is nothing before him but to drag out his life and die.

Loyalty according to Chinese Confucianism and loyalty in Japanese religion are fundamentally different. A Chinese sage said: "If the rulers are not fit rulers then the subjects are not obliged to accept them as rulers," and therefore if an emperor were incapable the people were relieved from obligations of loyalty; but in Japan there is nothing of the sort. No matter what character a ruler may have, we cling to him because he is the representative of the Imperial line. He is the direct descendant of the father of the people. Thus Confucianism has been fundamentally modified since coming to Japan.

Buddhism and Christianity are both individualistic, but Buddhism after passing through the Ryōbu Shintō and other transformations ended up in Shinshiu, a sect built on the idea of the family system, a totally different thing from what it was at first. In Japan if one's parents die we honor them because they have lived and nurtured us and we show this feeling of reverence by worship. Japan has reconciled the individualistic Buddhism of India with the communal principle of Japan. When Christianity was first introduced into Japan by Francis Xavier, a great many listened to his preaching, but upon asking what had become of their mothers who had never heard and believed in Christianity and being told that they were now under the tortures of eternal punishment, they said: "If that is so then we will have nothing to do with it," and we to-day would say that their decision was most praiseworthy. So Buddhism and Confucianism had to be transformed by the communal or family principle before they could be naturalized in Japan.

The problem before us to-day is how to build up a strong and great new nationality. From some points of view what may be called Western individualism must be heeded if we are

to stand up in the severe competition of modern life, for Western civilization is entirely a product of individualism; but on the other hand, if the family principle is overthrown then Japan will certainly be in grave danger. There is among young men a strong tendency to adopt the individualistic basis and make self-interest central. But if this tendency prevails, then we may prophesy that if another war occurs in fifty or a hundred years from now, the results will be far otherwise from what they were in the last.

It is a striking fact that our emperor's rescripts on education and on military duty, which used to excite the ridicule of Westerners are now praised and by not a few read in the same reverential tone as they read the Gospels. It is from the individualistic principle that the labor and social problems of the West have been born, and it is well-nigh impossible to avert strikes if this principle is adhered to. But in Japan strikes are comparatively few because when a man is employed, as, for instance, in the department of engraving and printing, if he falls sick, then members of his family are accepted as substitutes and if one member of a family is embarrassed he is helped out by all his relations. So, in Scotland where the clan system, which is analogous to our family system, prevails, such labor troubles are almost unknown. And recently in Winchester, England, a self-governing community based upon the family principle has been founded.

From this time on we must give particular attention to this great problem, both in politics and in education. Without individualism we must recognize that a complete character cannot be developed, and also that in order to prevail in competition we must sharpen each man's faculties by taking lessons of the individualism of the West, but we must ever be on guard to avoid the weak points of both principles and to harmonize their strong points. So far as one's own ideas and philosophy go, there is no objection to holding extreme individualistic views, but at the same time, for the sake of Japan and her maintenance among the nations of the world, we must hold to the family principle which has prevailed among us for 2,000 years, supplementing it by the individualism of the West.

We may then look forward to the formation of a new and completer nationality. But most of all we must be on guard against espousing extreme individualism.

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